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SUBJECT: CLOSER TIES UNDER DISCUSSION AS REGIONAL LEADERS MEET

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¶1. (U) Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Prime Minister Stevenson King of St. Lucia and President Bharat Jagdeo of Guyana joined Prime Minister Tillman Thomas of Grenada and Prime Minister Patrick Manning in Port of Spain August 14 to discuss regional issues. During the meeting, the five leaders signed a "Joint Declaration to establish a framework for closer cooperation towards the achievement of the single economy by 2011 and appropriate political integration by 2013." To this end, the leaders mandated that a study be completed in the next four months to determine how best to move toward political and economic integration. The regional heads also underscored that their declaration was "a statement of intent" and not meant to clash with any existing regional treaties or accords.

¶2. (U) The multilateral meeting came a day after PM Thomas began a State Visit to Trinidad that included meetings with Acting President Danny Montano, Manning and opposition leader Basdeo Panday. At a State Dinner that evening, Montano highlighted T&T's and Grenada's deep ties by referencing that the two countries were governed jointly in the 1830's. Montano also noted that Grenada has been the beneficiary of considerable economic and technical assistance from T&T, including roughly US\$38 million from GOTT Petroleum Stabilization Fund following Hurricane Ivan in 2004 and Hurricane Emily in 2005 and the provision of troops then to help in reconstruction efforts. Thomas returned Montano's kind words by noting that as a child he listened to radio stations from Trinidad and recalling a 1962 vote in Grenada for unifying with T&T that was never followed through.

¶3. (U) Thomas' visit was not without controversy, though, as the GOTT provided, at its expense, a private jet to transport him. In addition, Manning's office purchased a two-page welcome message that was published in all three major national newspapers. The opposition, and some members of the media, charged Manning was using public funds to make up to Thomas for past comments he had uttered regarding the Grenadian and an alleged political coup. The PM's office derided that claim.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: While the extent and importance of the joint declaration to move toward closer economic and political ties is unclear since it is not yet public, its announcement is in line with past aspirations expressed by Manning. The PM sees T&T as a leader in the region and the driver of a more unified, prosperous and secure Caribbean.

Kusnitz